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Statement submitted by Asociacion HazteOir.org a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Since the founding of this body, the United Nations has expressed its commitment to the advancement of women and girls all over the world. While great strides have been made in this area, the most vital of rights, the right to life is commonly forgotten and left out of this dialogue. Every human being deserves and needs, first, to have their right to life acknowledged and respected.

Alongside the right to life, we must continue to forge forward with the ever so important access to basic needs: food, clean water, education, housing, gainful employment, healthcare, safety, and security. These are the topics that must remain the priority of this body. Governments and this body can do and should do more.

Asociación HazteOir.org is shocked and appalled that today there are still countries where woman and girls are valued less than those of the opposite sex. In these countries, unborn baby girls are often denied their fundamental right to life, only because of their sex. These countries believe that women and girls are less worthy of living than men. And, sex-selective-abortion and infanticide, or access to reproductive health or rights, are portrayed as solutions rather than someone giving birth to a baby girl. The United Nations, regional working groups, Member States, NGOs, and individuals can do more and should do more to prevent this injustice. As pioneers for human rights, we can start by acknowledging our most fundamental human right: the right to life. Women and girls around the world deserve this action from us.

As we recognize the basic right to life for women and girls, we need to continue our efforts for solutions to guarantee equal access to the basic needs described above.

The 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women focused on Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. Among those challenges, Asociación HazteOir.org finds that access to education and infrastructure remain among achievable priorities, especially for women and girls from poorer and rural areas. There is still much more to do.

In a negative self-feeding cycle, rural women and their families have fewer opportunities to escape poverty and are more likely to receive inferior education and health-care. Women living in rural zones and far from main public services have an increased percentage of school drop-out, lower salaries, lack of access to the labour market, and implications for their physical and mental health.

Asociación HazteOir.org believes that all women and girls should have access to a quality education so that they can contribute to the advancement of their family, community, country, and region. The lack of education affects the lives of their children and those in their community. Global data shows that the under-five mortality rate decreases as mothers' education improves.

Equal opportunity and access to education for women and girls should be promoted at all level, including but not limited to early childhood, primary, secondary and post-secondary education, non-formal education, adult literacy education, skills development, and vocational training.

In developing countries, only half of pregnant women receive prenatal care at least once during pregnancy. Because of limited access, rural women are dying during pregnancy from failure to reach health facilities. The lack of access to emergency obstetric care remains a scandal for the world. More can and should be done.

Unfortunately, some in the international community use the needs of women and girls as an excuse and tactic to promote controversial social and health policies, both in the education and the health fields.

In actions implementing public policy, especially goals and targets for countries, we must consider different cultural diversities and respecting national policy.

The United Nations, its agencies and Member States need to be careful not to endorse or promote a broad approach to sexual and reproductive health, including the so-called comprehensive sexuality education, that seems to have more to do with ideology and changing social norms about family life and sexuality than it has with improving health outcomes for women and girls.

Investments to reduce maternal and child mortality should focus on making pregnancy and childbirth safer for mothers and their unborn children. The Millennium Development Goals tried to focus on maternal health outcomes and targeted interventions to prevent maternal deaths. Sadly, the 2030 Agenda seems to have preferred a focus on maternal health to emphasize fertility reduction once again.

On occasion, it may be thought that the use of contraceptives and even to abort unborn children are the answers to difficulties with the health of the mother. But often, these situations are only aggravated by poverty or living far from access to health facilities or proper care.

The international community will start seeing real results when it reprioritizes investments into maternal, pre and new-born health. Women do not need to die while giving birth, there are many health programs on improving the conditions of hospitals, protocols to follow up with pregnant women and the development of the unborn babies, as well as post-partum care.

While many offer abortion and contraception as the only solution, please note that poor or rural women do not die from giving birth to unwanted children, but children who are very much desired.

A legitimate question would be what could happen if the resources invested in promoting a culture of contraception and abortion were used to support the right to life and the well-being of pregnant mothers, unborn and already born children. Resources could be reinvested in the basics, building new and improving existing medical facilities. More doctors and skilled birth attendants could be trained. Better roads and transportation systems could be constructed to ensure rural and poor women and girls have access to medical facilities and maternal health-care.

At previous Commission on the Status of Women session negotiations, it has been difficult for Member States to find an agreement on agreed conclusions. Quite often, the Commission's agreed conclusions have proposed focusing on issues that went beyond international consensus, while trying to promote controversial policies that have not even demonstrated to be a health improvement.

Some groups promote abortion as the solution for women and girls. Inside the United Nations system, there are calls from actors such as working groups, treaty monitoring bodies, mandate holders or employees, quite often outside of their respective mandates, for States to repeal laws that protect the life of children in the womb. Those calls quite often are based on the false premise that women's health necessarily improves where abortion is permitted. Data on Global maternal mortality does not support this. There is no positive correlation between permissive abortion laws and maternal health. What the data shows is that maternal deaths from all causes, including from abortion, are reduced when maternal health overall improves.

At the same time, violations of human rights such as abortion, forced sterilization, forced abortion, sex-selective abortion and coercive and discriminatory family planning policies often go unnoticed and the same countries, working groups, treaty monitoring bodies, and mandate holders are silent. Abortion continues to claim girl victims, and disproportionately because of sex-selection. In regions of the world

where male preference is cultivated, girls are aborted before they even have a chance to take their first breath. Much more can and should be done.

The world's poor and rural areas are easy targets for the abortion industry. These women and girls deserve to be protected. They need Member States to denounce and punish these crimes, and to work together to re-create a world where women's and their children's lives are treasured, and their bodies are respected always, everywhere, and by everyone. Much more can and should be done.